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REPORTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES: SOCIAL QUESTIONS

Ways and means to enhance the capacity of the Organization and the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Report of the Secretary General

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INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolutions 50/203 and 51/69, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the General Assembly, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.

2. The Secretary-General, in his report on the implementation of the outcome of the Conference (A/51/322), noted the understanding of the Secretariat that the report requested in General Assembly resolution 50/203 would be provided on a rolling basis. The reports to the Commission on the Status of Women would contain early material; the reports to the Economic and Social Council would summarize it and add new material, including the results of the Commission itself; and the reports to the General Assembly would contain further material, including the results of the Council's deliberations. A particular effort was to be made in the reports to provide information that was most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body in order to facilitate intergovernmental decision-making. Thus the reports to the Economic and Social Council would facilitate the coordination function of the Council. They would focus on activities in the area of the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming by other bodies reporting to the Council, as well as at the inter-agency level, with a view to supporting the Council's responsibilities in system-wide coordination in mainstreaming of a gender perspective, a task requiring the Council's ongoing and long-term attention.

3. The present report is intended to update the information provided in the reports to the General Assembly in 1996[1] and the Commission on the Status of Women in 1997.[2] It focuses on developments related to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in intergovernmental forums reporting to the Council, by the regional commissions and in the Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

I. COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

4. In accordance with its agreed conclusions 1996/1,[3] the Commission on the Status of Women, at its forty-first session (10-21 March 1997), held four panel discussions which addressed four of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action: women and the environment; women in power and decision-making; women and the economy; and education and training of women.

5. The panel discussions were followed by dialogues among Governments, civil society and the United Nations system and among Governments themselves. Action-oriented agreed conclusions on the respective critical areas of concern, aimed at the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, were adopted.[4]

6. The agreed conclusions highlighted issues critical for the implementation of the Platform for Action; put new emphasis on specific actions or actors;

proposed innovative measures and tools to speed up the actions indicated in the Platform, and added some time-bound targets for implementation.

A. Women and the environment

7. The agreed conclusions adopted on women and the environment focused on mainstreaming a gender perspective, translating it into concrete actions and moving beyond the concept of women as a major group.[4] For example, all actors at the international level were requested to adopt a holistic, coordinated and collaborative approach to integrate a gender perspective into sustainable development and to apply a gender perspective in all funding programmes for sustainable development, while acknowledging the importance of continuing programming targeted at women. The importance of monitoring and accountability mechanisms to be established to assess gender mainstreaming and its impact was emphasized.

8. Development of additional analytical tools and methodologies for gender analysis was suggested to carry out gender impact assessments and to incorporate a gender perspective into all environmental impact assessments. The international community and the United Nations agencies were requested to provide assistance to developing countries in that respect.

9. Specific actions were suggested to carry out gender impact assessment of investment decisions and to complement the policies for liberalization of trade and investment by gender-sensitive social and environmental policies. Political parties were encouraged to incorporate gender-sensitive environmental goals into their platforms.

10. Emphasis was also placed on strengthening women's legal status, as an important requirement for their equal participation with men in all aspects of sustainable development. For example, it was suggested that participation in financial and technical decision-making by women should be supported through appropriate legislation and/or administrative regulations. It was also decided that women should be accorded full and equal rights to own land and other properties, inter alia, through inheritance.

B. Women in power and decision-making

11. The agreed conclusions on women in power and decision-making placed an emphasis on conflict resolution, peace and security matters, and the promotion of gender balance at all levels of national diplomatic service, including the ambassadorial level.[4] For example, Governments and the United Nations system were called upon to promote women's active and equal participation as governmental and non-governmental representatives, special rapporteurs and envoys in all of their initiatives and activities, including as mediators for peacekeeping and peace-building.

12. New aspects of women's representation and promotion of gender equality within the United Nations system were highlighted. For example, Member States were encouraged to include women in their delegations to all United Nations and

other conferences, including those dealing with security, political, economic, trade, human rights and legal issues, as well as their representation in all organs of the United Nations and other bodies such as International Financial Institutions where women's participation is negligible.

13. Additional tools were suggested to increase the participation and representation of women in Governments, political parties and international organizations, including the consideration of alternative approaches to and changes in institutional structures and practices and the establishment of specific time-bound targets. For example, Governments were called upon to commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in decision-making in administration and public appointments at all levels and in the diplomatic services, inter alia, by establishing specific time-bound targets.

14. To increase gender sensitivity and gender balance by Governments, businesses and political parties, the latter, for example, were encouraged to fund training programmes in conducting campaigns, fund-raising and parliamentary procedures to enable women successfully to run for, be elected to, and serve in public office and the legislature.

15. In order to improve and speed up communication and the exchange of information necessary for mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, including bilateral and multilateral assistance, international and multilateral agencies were encouraged to collect and disseminate information on best practices, lessons learned and the use of gender-impact assessments.

C. Women and the economy

16. The agreed conclusions in the area of women and the economy placed more emphasis on the issue of economic decision-making.[4] To accelerate women's access to economic decision-making, a systematic and multifaceted approach was requested.

17. The definition of women economic decision makers was expanded to include paid workers, managers, employers, elected officials, members of non-governmental organizations and unions, producers, household managers and consumers. Positive or affirmative action was recognized as an effective tool to improve women's position in sectors and levels of the economy where they were under-represented.

18. The need for mainstreaming a gender perspective into economic policies was highlighted. Economic policies and structural adjustment programmes should be formulated and monitored in order to generate positive results for women and men, drawing on research on the gender impact of macro- and micro-economic policies.

19. Some innovative measures were suggested to enhance the situation of women entrepreneurs. They included support to businesses owned by women in environmental, resource-based and export-oriented industries; development of incentives for outstanding women entrepreneurs; and training focused on

institutional capacity-building and consciousness-raising. A call was made to evaluate women micro-credit schemes.

20. Attention was given to transnational corporations and the role which Governments should play to monitor and enforce equal opportunity policies and labour laws. The role of women and men as consumers and investors who can use their power to support women-friendly corporations and socially responsible businesses was stressed.

D. Education and training of women

21. The main attention of the agreed conclusions on education and training of women was directed towards the implementation of the goals and benchmarks set by the Platform for Action with regard to the equal and universal access of girls to education.[4] In order to implement those goals and to create an enabling environment to retain women and girls in schools, school authorities, parents, and administrative personnel should, inter alia, ensure safety in schools and during extracurricular activities and organize school teaching programmes, transport, and boarding schools, if necessary.

22. Emphasis was put on the need for gender-sensitive programmes and training. Teacher training was an essential component in the transmittal of gender-sensitive programmes for eliminating the differential behavioural expectations of girls and boys which reinforce the gender division of labour. Not only teachers but also trainers, school administrators and planners should receive gender-sensitivity training. Parents and policy makers were mentioned as additional influential actors. The development of gender-sensitive teaching materials, positive action measures and gender impact assessment was also requested. Early childhood education should be made gender sensitive and provided especially to groups under difficult circumstances.

23. It was highlighted that education, technical training and lifelong learning were integral parts on a continuum, implying that knowledge and skills acquired in formal as well as non-formal, out-of-school education, community activities and traditional knowledge are valued and recognized. Educational programmes therefore should take a holistic approach, ensuring that women enjoy equality throughout the process in a new learning culture involving individuals, enterprises, organizations and society at large.

24. The agreed conclusions, in line with the Platform for Action, recognized the interlinkage between education and training policies, on the one hand, and labour market policies, on the other hand, with an emphasis on the employment and employability of women. In order to enhance the employability of women, basic education and vocational qualifications, in particular in the fields of science and technology, are of great importance. It was requested that national statistical offices, Governments, research institutions, employers and workers' organizations should provide women with the best available labour market information.

25. It was suggested that the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, within their existing mandates, should compile and disseminate information on

best practices or strategies for retaining women and girls at all levels of education.

E. Other decisions of the Commission on the Status of Women

26. The Commission adopted a number of resolutions.[5] Resolution 41/6, on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, contained views and suggestions for consideration by the Commission when it addresses the question during its 1997 coordination segment.

27. In its draft resolution I on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, which it recommended to the Council for adoption, the Commission urged all actors to intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance and requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women. In its resolution 41/1, on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to present a report for its forty-second session.

28. In resolution 41/2, on older women, human rights and development, the Commission decided to consider the situation of older women as an emerging issue at its forty-second session and to pay special attention to the violation of older women's rights. The Commission also adopted resolution 41/4, on violence against women migrant workers, in which it took note of the Expert Group Meeting on Violence against Women Migrant Workers. Furthermore, the Commission adopted resolution 41/5, on traffic in women and girls, which contained various recommendations for Governments on how to eliminate the traffic in women and girls.

II. RESULTS OF OTHER FUNCTIONAL COMMISSIONS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

29. Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women was addressed to some extent in 1997 by other functional commissions of the Council.[6] Women's issues were the subject of a number of discussions held and resolutions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-third session. Other Commissions addressed or applied a gender perspective to a lesser extent.

A. Commission on Population and Development

30. The Commission on Population and Development had decided to give special emphasis to gender issues. Therefore, at its thirtieth session (14-18 February 1997), the Commission's priority theme was "International migration, with special emphasis on the linkages between migration and development, including gender issues and the family". In its draft resolution, on international migration and development, and in resolution 1997/1, on a technical symposium on international migration, provisions contained in the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. In its draft decision, it decided that in 1998, at its thirty-first session, the focus

would be "Health and mortality, with special emphasis on the linkages between health and development and on gender and age".[7]

B. Statistical Commission

31. The Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session (11-14 February 1997), recognized the need for an integrated programme of statistics and indicators to monitor the follow-up to the recent United Nations conferences in the social fields - namely, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Social Summit and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Commission endorsed the Minimum National Social Data Set as a first step in establishing a common national and international indicators database. The set consists of 15 indicators, measuring, inter alia, population; life expectancy; infant, child and maternal mortality; contraceptive prevalence; years of schooling; number of people per room; access to safe water and sanitation; monetary value of a basket of food; GDP per capita, household income; unemployment rate, and employment/population ratio. Most of the indicators were based on sex-disaggregated data and/or were relevant for measuring the situation of women.[8]

C. Commission for Social Development

32. The Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session (25 February to 6 March 1997) focused on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods. The Commission reiterated the goal of full employment and highlighted various strategies to meet that goal. In its agreed conclusions on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods, in resolution 35/2, the Commission underscored the importance of mainstreaming gender in all policies and programmes related to employment.[9] The Commission urged Governments to apply a gender perspective in the formulation of policies aimed at employment creation and recommended that a gender-impact analysis be a regular feature in all stages of the policy-making process.[10] The Commission encouraged Governments to enhance women's active political and economic decision-making and to improve women's access to economic resources.[11] The Commission also called for a broader understanding of work, including unpaid work. It urged Governments to adopt policies that enabled workers to combine work and family responsibilities and therefore facilitated sharing of paid work and unpaid caring tasks equally between women and men.[12]

33. Three draft resolutions adopted by the Commission for Social Development explicitly highlighted the importance of gender.[13] In draft resolution I, on the International Year of Older Persons, the Commission referred to the provisions contained in the Platform for Action. It called on States to include a gender dimension in their national programmes for the Year and welcomed contributions by the Commission on the Status of Women on the topic of older women in relation to the Year. In draft resolution II, on persons with disabilities, the Commission urged the Secretary-General and Governments to give full attention to a gender perspective in all policies and programmes related to disability. In draft resolution V, on follow-up to the International Year of the Family, it

emphasized that equality between women and men was essential to the well-being of the family and of society at large.

D. Commission on Human Rights

34. At its fifty-third session (10 March to 18 April 1997), the Commission on Human Rights adopted a number of resolutions specific to women's enjoyment of human rights.[14] Gender issues were also addressed in resolutions on the work of thematic and country-specific rapporteurs and working groups and in several other resolutions. The need to give consideration to the human rights of women and the girl child in the preparations for the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was addressed in resolution 1997/43 and underlined in resolution 1997/35.

1. Integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system

35. The Commission expressed concern that the implementation of the recommendations of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action remained far from established goals. Intensified efforts at the international level and by the High Commissioner for Human Rights were called for to continue to coordinate the activities of the relevant United Nations organs, bodies and mechanisms dealing with the human rights of women. Recent efforts to integrate a gender perspective into the technical cooperation programme of the Centre for Human Rights were welcomed.

36. By one resolution, special rapporteurs, special procedures and other human rights mechanisms of the Commission and the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities were requested to take a gender perspective regularly and systematically into account in the implementation of their mandates and to include information and qualitative analysis in their reports on violations of the human rights of women. The importance of implementing recommendations relating to working methods and reporting methodology, including sources of information and gender-specific analysis in conclusions and recommendations was stressed. Strengthened cooperation between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women and between the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women was called for, to ensure the success of the annual joint work plan.

37. Success in mainstreaming women's rights was seen as dependent on the formalization, at the highest levels, of a clear policy and guidelines on the integration of a gender perspective into the United Nations human rights system. The need to develop practical strategies to implement the recommendations contained in the report of the expert group meeting on the development of guidelines for the integration of a gender perspective into human rights activities and programmes (E/CN.4/1996/105) was highlighted. The efforts of the treaty bodies to monitor more effectively the human rights of women was welcomed. Specific reference was made to the round table on human rights approaches to women's health, with a focus on reproductive and sexual health rights, organized jointly by the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations

Population Fund (Glen Cove, New York, United States, December 1996). The responsibility of all treaty bodies to integrate a gender perspective was reiterated, as was their need to develop gender-sensitive guidelines to be used in the review of States parties' reports. The importance of a common strategy among treaty bodies for mainstreaming the human rights of women was emphasized. Treaty bodies were encouraged, on a regular basis, to exchange information on the development of general comments and general recommendations, with a view to the preparation of general comments that reflected a gender perspective. Treaty bodies were also urged to incorporate a gender perspective into concluding observations so that the concluding observations of each treaty body would delineate the strength and weaknesses of each State party insofar as the enjoyment by women of the rights guaranteed by a particular treaty were concerned.

38. Relevant organs, bodies and agencies of the United Nations system, all human rights bodies of the United Nations system, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were urged to provide training in the human rights of women for all United Nations personnel and officials, especially those in human rights and humanitarian relief activities. The Centre for Human Rights was encouraged to undertake a systematic review of its information and training materials, including materials relating to the conduct of field operations, with a view to revising such materials where necessary in order to ensure the integration of a gender perspective and to bear in mind the need for expertise in the human rights of women in the recruitment of staff.

2. Violence against women

39. In its resolution on violence against women migrant workers, the Commission reviewed the report of the United Nations expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (Manila, 27-31 May 1996). A comprehensive report on the issue, taking account of information received from within the United Nations system, Member States, intergovernmental and other bodies was requested for the fifty-fourth session of the Commission.

40. In the resolution on traffic in women and girls, the Commission welcomed the convening of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children (Stockholm, August 1996). Governments were called on to implement the Platform for Action by ratifying and enforcing international conventions on trafficking in persons and on slavery and to take appropriate measures to address root factors of trafficking, including external factors and practices such as forced marriages and forced labour.

41. The Commission noted that States must exercise due diligence to prevent violence against women, including violence against women in the family and in the community. It also encouraged States participating in the drafting of the statute of the International Criminal Court to give full consideration to integrating a gender perspective.

42. The Commission decided to continue the consideration of the question of violence against women as a matter of high priority at its fifty-fourth session.

3. Thematic rapporteurs and working groups

43. In several resolutions related to the work of thematic rapporteurs and working groups, specific reference was made to the need to apply a gender perspective, inter alia, through the identification of gender-specific abuses; through the reporting process, including information collection, and in recommendations. Thematic special rapporteurs and working groups were invited to include regularly in their reports sex-disaggregated data and to address the characteristics and practice of the human rights violations under their mandates which were specifically or primarily directed against women or to which women were particularly vulnerable, in order to ensure the effective protection of human rights.

44. The Commission commended the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences for her work during her three-year mandate and renewed her mandate for a further three years. The Special Rapporteur was encouraged to examine and compile information on existing human rights, humanitarian and other standards and instruments relating to trafficking in women and girls, in dialogue with Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Secretary-General was requested to ensure that the reports of the Special Rapporteur were brought to the attention of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, so as to assist it in its work in the area of the human rights of women and violence against women, and to the attention of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In a number of other resolutions, the Commission urged collaboration between the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and other thematic and country-specific rapporteurs.

45. In one resolution the Commission stressed the need for the Special Rapporteur on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief to apply a gender perspective in the work. Similarly, in the resolution on the Working Group on the Question of Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, it called for a gender perspective. In the resolution relating to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, it invited the Special Rapporteur to continue to examine questions concerning torture directed at women and conditions conducive to such torture, to make appropriate recommendations concerning the prevention and redress of gender-specific forms of torture, and to exchange views with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, with a view to enhancing further their effectiveness and mutual cooperation.

46. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression was invited to continue, in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, to pay particular attention to the situation of women and the relationship between the effective promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and incidents of discrimination based on sex, which create obstacles for women with regard to their right to seek, receive and impart information. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression was also invited to consider how those obstacles impeded the ability of women to make informed choices in areas of particular importance to them and in areas related to the general decision-making processes in the societies in which they live.

4. Country-specific resolutions

47. Gender as a factor in the enjoyment of human rights was addressed by the Commission on Human Rights in a number of its country-specific resolutions:

(a) Somalia: Concern was expressed at violence against women and children;

(b) Cambodia: Grave concern about numerous instances of violations of human rights, including rape, was expressed. The Government of Cambodia was urged to give priority to combating child prostitution and trafficking;

(c) Haiti: The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women was invited to consider favourably the invitation by the Government of Haiti to visit the country;

(d) Nigeria: The Commission called for the appointment of a special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria who would keep a gender perspective in mind when seeking and analysing information;

(e) Islamic Republic of Iran: The Special Rapporteur on Iran was requested to keep a gender perspective in mind when seeking and analysing information;

(f) Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro): Concern was expressed for women and children, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were victims of rape used as a weapon of war. The Commission demanded that the perpetrators of rape be brought to justice and the victims and witnesses receive adequate assistance and protection;

(g) Zaire: Concern was expressed at the lack of improvement in the human rights situation, and, in particular, violence against women;

(h) Sudan: Concern was expressed at continued reports of the sale and trafficking of children, ideological indoctrination or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, especially affecting displaced families and women and children belonging to racial, ethnic and religious minorities. Concern was also expressed about policies, practices and activities that were directed against, and particularly violated, the human rights of women, and girls and the continuation of such practices, including civil and judicial discrimination against women as reported by the Special Rapporteur. The Government was encouraged to work actively towards the eradication of practices that were directed against, and particularly violated, the human rights of women and girls, especially in the light of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

(i) Burundi: All parties to the conflict were urged to end the cycle of violence and killing - notably, the indiscriminate violence against refugees, women, children and the elderly. The Special Rapporteur was requested to apply a gender perspective in his work in that country;

(j) Afghanistan: Concern was expressed at reports of violations and abuses against women and children, especially regarding access to basic education for girl children and access by women to employment and training and their effective participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. In accordance with international human rights instruments, all Afghan parties were called on to respect fully and act in accordance with all human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion. They were urged to restore respect for all the human rights of women and to take measures to ensure the effective participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life throughout the country. Respect for the right of women to work and for the right of women and girls to education without discrimination was emphasized. The reopening of schools and the admission of women and girls to higher levels of education was urged, as was respect for women's right to security of person. The Commission hoped that those responsible for physical attacks on women would be brought to justice. Measures to ensure respect for women's freedom of movement were urged, as was effective access to the facilities necessary to protect women's right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan was encouraged to continue to pay attention to the human rights of women and children and to apply a gender perspective, as he had done in the past, in his report to the Commission at its fifty-third session;

(k) Rwanda: The Government was called upon to investigate with vigour, the cases of rape and other sexual violence that had occurred during and after the genocide, and, where possible, to prosecute and punish them. The Government was requested to take steps to facilitate the participation of women, particularly genocide survivors and recent returnees, in all phases of social and economic reconstruction, with particular attention to matters concerning ownership of property. The Government was also encouraged to extend an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to visit Rwanda for the purpose of studying the issue of sexual violence, its causes and consequences, and its relationship to the ongoing work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and of national tribunals.

5. Human rights, extreme poverty and the right to development

48. The Commission noted that a better understanding was needed of what was endured by people, including women and children, living in poverty. Treaty bodies monitoring the application of human rights instruments, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, were invited to take account, when considering the reports of States parties, of the question of extreme poverty and human rights. The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights was requested to submit to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session, in accordance with agreed conclusions 1996/1 of the Economic and Social Council,[15] a report, to be prepared by the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women, on the obstacles encountered and progress achieved in the field of women's rights relating to economic resources, the elimination of poverty and economic development, in particular for women living in extreme poverty.

49. In the resolution concerning the question of the realization in all countries of the economic, social and cultural rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and study of special problems which the developing countries faced in their efforts to achieve those human rights, the Commission called upon States to secure, through national development policies and international cooperation, full respect for economic, social and cultural rights, giving priority to individuals, most often women, living in extreme poverty.

50. In the resolution on the right to development, the need to apply a gender perspective in the implementation of the right to development by ensuring that women play an active role in the development process was affirmed.

6. The girl child

51. An analysis of the importance of gender in the enjoyment of human rights was found in the resolution concerning the rights of the child. States and international and non-governmental organizations were urged to take into account the rights and particular needs of girls, especially in education, health and nutrition. They were urged to eliminate negative cultural practices and attitudes against girls and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and the root causes of son preference, which resulted in harmful and unethical practices, inter alia, by enacting and enforcing legislation protecting girls from violence, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, genital mutilation, incest, sexual abuse and exploitation. They were also urged to develop age-appropriate, safe and confidential programmes and medical, social and psychological support services to assist girls who were subjected to violence. Rape in the conduct of armed conflict was affirmed as constituting a war crime and, under certain circumstances, a crime against humanity and an act of genocide. States were called upon to protect women and children from gender-based violence, including rape, sexual exploitation and forced pregnancy, and to strengthen mechanisms to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. It was stressed that all humanitarian responses in conflict situations should emphasize the special reproductive health needs of women and girls, including those that arose from pregnancy as a result of rape, sexual mutilation, childbirth at an early age or infection with sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, and access to family planning services.

52. The Secretary-General was requested, in cooperation with States, international organizations and relevant non-governmental organizations to consider organizing regional training programmes for members of the armed forces relating to the protection of children and women during armed conflict. States and other parties to armed conflicts were called on to recognize the particular vulnerability of refugee and internally displaced children to recruitment into armed forces and to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. States were also requested systematically to assess and examine, in close cooperation with international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, the magnitude, nature and causes of the exploitation of child labour and to develop and implement strategies for combating these practices, and in so doing pay attention to specific dangers faced by girls.

7. Other resolutions with references to gender

53. In the resolution relating to the question of the death penalty, States that still maintained the death penalty were urged by the Commission to comply fully with their obligations under various human rights treaties and to exclude women from capital punishment. In resolution 1997/28, relating to hostage-taking, alarm was expressed at the taking hostage of women and children. In resolution 1997/33, on the protection of human rights in the context of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), States were urged, in collaboration and through the community, to promote a supportive and enabling environment for women, children and other vulnerable groups, by addressing underlying prejudices and inequalities through community dialogue, specially designed social and health services, and support community groups.

E. Commission on Sustainable Development

54. The fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (7-25 April 1997) was held to prepare for the special session of the General Assembly on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, to be held in June 1997. The discussion covered the entire spectrum of Agenda 21 issues, but did not address the mainstreaming of a gender perspective.

55. However, the Commission did state that more opportunities should be created for women to participate effectively in economic, social and political development as equal partners in all sectors of the economy, and that capacity-building efforts should pay particular attention to the needs of women in that respect. It also emphasized that the empowerment of women was a crucial factor for the eradication of poverty and that the priority actions should address the disproportionate impact of poverty on women. Full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was essential. Moreover, it mentioned the importance of further expansion of basic education with full and equal access for girls and women to all levels of education and training.

56. In compliance with the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action to promote coordination within and among institutions to implement the Platform for Action and chapter 24 of Agenda 21 and with the agreed conclusions on women and the environment adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-first session,[4] the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women transmitted those agreed conclusions to the Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development in order to have them issued as an official document of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

57. The Commission facilitated dialogue among the 10 major groups identified in Agenda 21 and Governments by organizing 10 dialogue sessions as an official part of its fifth session. One of the dialogues was organized with representatives of women's groups. The session recognized that Agenda 21 had put the issue of women and sustainable development on the global agenda and recalled that the Fourth World Conference on Women had further elaborated the objectives set out in Agenda 21. The dialogue session proposed earmarking 1 per cent of all aid dispersed through the World Bank, regional development banks or other

international financial institutions for improving the situation of rural women. It reaffirmed the recommendation that emerged from the Micro-Credit Summit (1997, Washington, D.C.) to provide $21.7 billion in micro-credit to poor people, ensuring that 100 million of the poorest women would receive credit for self-employment by the year 2005.

F. Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

58. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its sixth session (28 April to 9 May 1997) considered issues related to women and gender under the agenda item "Strategies for crime prevention and control, particularly in urban areas and in the context of public security". Under the item, the Commission reviewed, inter alia, policies regarding violence against women and trafficking in children. It considered the revised draft on practical measures, strategies and activities in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice for the elimination of violence against women (E/CN.15/1997/11) and adopted a resolution on violence against women in which it stressed that the effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women contributed to the elimination of violence against women and that the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women strengthened that process. In the resolution the Commission referred to the need to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice and to develop strategies and practical measures in that regard. Inter alia, it requested the Secretary-General to transmit the agreed practical measures and strategies to relevant United Nations organizations, including the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and invites them to develop strategies and practical measures on the elimination of violence against women within the context of their expertise.

III. ACTIVITIES BY THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

59. Since the activities of the regional commissions are presented in the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation (E/1997/40), the section below describes follow-up activities to the Fourth World Conference on Women which have been undertaken by the secretariats of those Commissions in their respective regions. They include workshops, training session and policy-oriented meetings.

A. Economic Commission for Africa

60. A workshop on women entrepreneurs and economic empowerment was held in Accra, Ghana, in February 1997 as a follow-up to the First Global Trade Fair and Investment Forum, held in Ghana in July 1996. A regional conference on functional literacy and the girl child and the East African Post-Beijing Forum were held in Kampala, Uganda, with the objective of sharing and developing strategies for ensuring implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the subregion.

61. An Expert Group Meeting and a Women's Leadership Forum on Peace were held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 4 to 8 November 1996. Also, a Pan-African Conference on Peace, Gender and Development was organized by the Government of Rwanda, ECA and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference, with the objective of promoting peace, development and gender equality. The Conference adopted the Kigali Plan of Action for Conflict-affected Areas and the Kigali Declaration on Peace.

62. The Commission and OAU co-sponsored the organization of the First Summit of First Ladies for Peace and Humanitarian Issues, held in Abuja, Nigeria. The Summit was proposed by the First Ladies in Beijing as a means of practical follow-up.

63. From 11 to 13 June 1997, an expert group meeting on gender networking was scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to discuss follow-up to the Beijing and Dakar Platforms for Action in relation to economic empowerment of women, women's legal rights, and the participation of women in decision-making.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

64. The Women and Development Unit of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) focused on emerging challenges facing its regional member countries, including policies and measures for improving the status of Arab women and capacity-building. It began to compile a database on national policies and measures implemented by member States in critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action and the Arab Regional Plan of Action to the year 2005. The data would provide material for policy analysis and formulation, identification of gaps, and provision of technical assistance to member States. Also, a survey was conducted to assess the institutional and networking capacity of non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza.

65. ESCWA was also involved in identifying the extent of the feminization of poverty and in the development of a gender index for the region. In March 1997, ESCWA convened the first session of the Integrated Regional Follow-up to Global Conferences, which included the issue of gender mainstreaming in all plans of action of global conferences held in 1995-1996 and policies for the advancement of women. ESCWA also provided substantive backstopping to the Arab Regional Conference on One Year Beyond Beijing/Meeting of Ministers of Social Affairs, which clearly identified critical issues for the region. Through its regional adviser for social development and its UNFPA population expert, ESCWA assisted the National Jordanian Women's Committee in adopting a multisectoral and interministerial national plan of action, which was presented as a model for other national plans.

C. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

66. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provided an institutional framework for various collaborative activities based on the Jakarta Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001. ESCAP

disseminated material from the Fourth World Conference on Women, including a videotape on critical areas of concern, a brochure on regional plans of action, and guidelines for their implementation. Workshops were organized to discuss the implementation of the Platform for Action. Programmes were also oriented towards the empowerment of women by increasing gender equality in access to productive resources and social services.

67. A regional meeting on strengthening national machinery for the advancement of women was held from 16 to 19 October 1996 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. National workshops on implementing the Jakarta Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action were held in Lahore, Pakistan, on 28-29 November 1996; in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 2-3 December; in Hyderabad, India, on 5-6 December; in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 9-10 December; and in Lahore, Pakistan, in June 1997. ESCAP was involved in the development of national action plans in specific critical areas of concern identified in the Platform and in monitoring their implementation through data obtained from a regional questionnaire survey. Action was being taken to mainstream women's issues and a gender perspective into ESCAP's programme of work.

D. Economic Commission for Europe

68. At its fifty-second (jubilee) session, held in April 1997, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) adopted a plan of action which outlined a broad reform of its programme and methods of work. The plan identified the mainstreaming of a gender perspective as a cross-sectoral concern which should permeate all ECE activities. At their 1996 annual meeting, four principal subsidiary bodies had already considered the issue and highlighted the link between mainstreaming a gender perspective and a higher proportion of women in delegations of member States.

69. In items of specific activities, ECE was involved in the promotion of women entrepreneurship. It gathered best practices on the policy, legislation and institutional framework supporting the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises by women entrepreneurs and disseminated those practices to the governmental and non-governmental parties concerned. In November 1996, ECE organized a workshop on social protection, poverty and older persons at risk, which considered the issue of long outstanding and new forms of poverty among older women. Particular attention was given to the social security rights of such women and their role in the informal sector. With the support of UNFPA, ECE was carrying out a survey on partnership and reproductive behaviour in the countries of the region. A network report had recently been published, the first in a series of 20 comparable country reports planned within the framework of the survey.

70. Finally, ECE co-sponsored a subregional conference of senior governmental experts on the Implementation of the Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe (Bucharest, Romania, 12-14 September 1996), organized jointly by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Regional Bureau for Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the United Nations Development Programme, in cooperation with the Government of Romania. The conference elaborated a model national action plan for the implementation of the Platform in Central and

Eastern European countries. The ECE substantive contribution focused on strengthening of national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

E. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

71. The presiding officers of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean met on 18 and 19 November 1996 at Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The presiding officers decided that the Seventh Regional Conference would be held in Santiago, Chile, on 19 and 21 November 1997, and that the two priority topics for the session would be decision-making and sustainable development and poverty. On 27 and 28 May 1997, the twenty-fourth session of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference was held, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women was commemorated.

72. An expert group meeting was held from 28 to 30 April 1997 on the modalities for the establishment of relations between Governments and non-governmental organizations of the region in the framework of preparations for the Seventh Regional Conference.

IV. ACC INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

73. The second session of the ACC Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality took place on 5 and 6 March 1997 at United Nations Headquarters.[16] The Committee continued its efforts in support of implementation of the Platform for Action and in mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system. It discussed preparations for the consideration of the topic by the Economic and Social Council at its 1997 coordination segment. Emphasis was placed, inter alia, on the need better to understand how resources benefited women and men, respectively, as a result of mainstreaming, to collect lessons learned, to evaluate quantitative and qualitative indicators with regard to gender, and to move towards better accountability for mainstreaming. Contributions of members to a number of reports of the Secretary-General prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women, such as the report on the situation of rural women, the report on effective mobilization and integration of women in development and the 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, were discussed, and a process for providing such contributions was agreed upon.

74. The Committee set up an inter-sessional working group to prepare issues for discussion by the Committee at its annual sessions. A joint workshop would be convened in the third quarter of 1997 between the Inter-agency Committee and the Women in Development group of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, to share experiences and to develop common strategies in support of implementing the Platform for Action and mainstreaming a gender perspective at the national level in multilateral and bilateral development cooperation.

75. The third session of the Inter-agency Committee will take place from 25-27 February 1998 at the United Nations Headquarters, New York.

Notes

[1] A/51/322.

[2] E/CN.6/1997/2.

[3] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 6 (E/1996/26), chap. I, sect. C.1.

[4] Ibid., 1997, Supplement No. 7 (E/1997/27), chap. I, sect. C.1.

[5] Ibid., sect. C.2.

[6] One Commission that did not explicitly address the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women was the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which met from 18 to 26 March 1997. Nevertheless, in 1998 it would consider the draft declaration on the guiding principles of drug demand reduction, which made specific reference to the situation of women.

[7] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 5 (E/1997/25), chap. I, sects. A and B.

[8] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4 (E/1997/24), para. 67.

[9] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 6 (E/1997/26), chap. I, sect. D, resolution 35/2, agreed conclusions on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods, para. 4.

[10] Ibid., para. 20.

[11] Ibid., para. 21.

[12] Ibid., para. 24.

[13] Ibid., sect. A.

[14] Ibid., Supplement No. 3 (E/1997/23). To be issued.

[15] A/51/3 (Part I), chap. III.A.

[16] A summary of the results of the Committee's first session is contained in document E/CN.6/1997/2, paras. 25-30. Additional information on the work of the Committee is also contained in the report of the Secretary-General on integrated follow-up to recent global conferences, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/36.